

STOCKS		COMMODITIES		ASIAN MARKETS				CURRENCIES			
DSEX	CSCX	Gold	Oil	MUMBAI	TOKYO	SINGAPORE	SHANGHAI	USD	EUR	GBP	CNY
▼ 1.65%	▼ 1.62%	\$1,796.01	\$64.07	▼ 2.25%	▲ 0.46%	▲ 0.02%	▼ 1.45%	BUY TK 83.95	100.72	116.86	12.76
5,385.21	9,389.08	(per ounce)	(per barrel)	49,744.32	30,156.03	2,881.21	3,642.44	SELL TK 84.95	104.52	120.66	13.42



Small garment factories struggling to stay afloat

REFAVET ULLAH MIRDHA

The dearth of work orders from international retailers and brands to small and medium-sized garment factories is so acute that many entrepreneurs are looking for buyers to sell units and exit the industry for good.

The fallouts of the coronavirus pandemic have brought the SME garment units to their knees as orders collapsed with the global drop in sales.

The units of the apparel industry, considered the lifeline of Bangladesh's economy, had faced abnormal delays in payment from buyers, order cancellations and suspensions and non-availability of loans from the stimulus package.

However, the large garment factories in this top export earning sector are faring better to some extent when it comes to getting orders, thanks to better coping mechanisms stemming from their large production facilities and ability to make shipments on time.

During the pandemic last year, 300 SME units which are also members of the BGMEA had to shut down, said Rezwana Selim, a director of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), citing the trade body's data.

Of them, nearly 20 factories have reopened and some are struggling to reopen as they did not receive work orders and were not able to manage funds, said Selim, who looks after labour affairs and closed factories.

The flow of work orders is not good even for the big factories, he added.

A majority of the factories, particularly the SMEs, are running at 40 to 50 per cent capacity because of the lockdown in major export destinations due to the second wave, he said.

Since the inflow of orders in big units is slow, the SMEs are not getting the associated subcontracting orders, Selim said.

Nearly 50,000 workers lost jobs for the closure of the factories, he said.

Seeking to remain unnamed, a garment factory owner in Gazipur said he was looking for a buyer for his factory built in 2017 on 22 bighas of land.

He had 1,400 workers in his factory before the pandemic hit the country in March last year. Six months later in September, he had to shut the factory, leaving his workers without a job.

The entrepreneur

PANDEMIC IMPACT ON SMALL UNITS

300 factories were shut

20 reopened

50,000 workers lost jobs

EFFECT ON OVERALL INDUSTRY

About 3.57 lakh jobs wiped out, study says

More than 50% of factories had fewer workers in Sep



partially reopened the factory to cater to the domestic market. Now 70 workers are employed at his factory.

The over-60-year-old investor lost Tk 12 crore as one of his American buyers declared bankruptcy due to the Covid-19.

As production came to a halt, raw materials worth Tk 20 crore lay unused on his factory floor and at the port.

"I had been struggling to revive my business even before the pandemic as I spent a lot of money to comply with the

factory safety recommendations of the Accord," he said.

The Accord on Building and Fire Safety in Bangladesh had referred factory safety improvement plans. In Bangladesh, more than 70 per cent of garment factories are small and medium-sized.

About 10 per cent of the factories said during the ongoing business slowdown, 50 per cent to 100 per cent of the work orders did not cover costs, yet those had to be accepted.

READ MORE ON B3

KEPZ to build first private hi-tech park

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A hi-tech park will be set up at Korean Export Processing Zone (KEPZ) in Chattogram, which is owned by Korean global business conglomerate Youngone.

The KEPZ will develop 100 acres out of 2,492 acres of land to set up the country's first privately-owned IT and hi-tech park.

A tripartite agreement was signed among Bangladesh High-Tech Park Authority (BHITPA), the KEPZ and Startup Bangladesh at the zone yesterday to develop a high-tech industry and innovation ecosystem, says a press release.

Cooperation will focus on developing infrastructures, increasing foreign investment, strengthening the start-up ecosystem and support entrepreneurs through upskilling by way of startup camps, design thinking and innovation projects.

The parties envision to collaborate and exchange knowledge and expertise regarding technology and associated sectors for innovations, developing collaborative relationship with foreign countries, especially with South Korea and the US, and conducting joint research activities.

"Bangladesh High Tech Park Authority will create digital entrepreneurs by developing an innovation ecosystem in the country to increase investment from the private sector," said State Minister for ICT Division Zunaid Ahmed Palak as chief guest.

There will be no problem in inflow of investment in the proposed park, although mutation of the land has not been completed, he said.

Palak said Samsung, another Korean company, wanted to invest in this park in 2004, but unfortunately it could not make the investment.

The government allocated the zone's land to Youngone in 1999.

Later, Samsung placed its investment in Vietnam and now exports \$70 billion worth mobile products from there, he said.

Samsung has also been assembling mobile phones at a Bangladeshi factory in Narsingdi and will start producing sets within the next one year, Palak said.

"We want our youth to put their minds into creating jobs rather than looking for them," he said.

READ MORE ON B3

Farmers get funds to recoup flood-induced losses

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The agriculture ministry has so far provided incentives worth Tk 372 crore among 57 lakh farmers to help them recover from losses incurred from repeated floods and the pandemic.

It also intended to encourage diversification of crops during the winter season, said a press release from the ministry.

Farmers were given seeds, saplings and fertiliser for the cultivation of crops on nearly 23.65 lakh bighas of land.

Of the fund, Tk 122 crore was intended to cover losses. Another Tk 90 crore was for increasing cultivation of sunflower, black gram, mustard and maize.

READ MORE ON B3

DELTA LIFE INS CRISIS

BSEC appoints special auditor to find out reasons

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission (BSEC) has appointed a special auditor for Delta Life Insurance Company to assess the firm's health.

The move comes following allegations of regulatory breaches by the listed insurer.

The Insurance Development and Regulatory Authority (IDRA) appointed Sultan-ul-Abidin Mollah as an administrator of Delta Life Insurance on February 11.

The IDRA said they took this initiative to protect the policyholders' interests and submit a report on the company's situation within four months.

Earlier, Delta Life Insurance accused IDRA Chairman M Mosharraf Hossain of seeking Tk 50 lakh in bribes to approve the reappointment of the company's CEO and renewing

AT A GLANCE

- BSEC move comes following allegations of regulatory breaches against the insurer
- IDRA appointed administrator for it on Feb 11
- Administrator to submit report by four months
- Delta had accused IDRA chief of seeking Tk 50 lakh in bribe
- Insurer filed a complaint with ACC and later applied to withdraw it

the actuarial valuation basis.

The insurer filed a complaint against Hossain with the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) on December 7 last year, alleging that he demanded a bribe, and then again on December 9.

"Regarding the ongoing crisis, we listened to a statement from Delta Life Insurance and the IDRA," said Prof Shibli Rubayat-Ul Islam, chairman of the BSEC, during a press briefing.

"After listening to both sides, it seems that there are two stories. So, our duty is to find out the real thing and to that end, we have appointed a special auditor," Islam added.

The press briefing was organised at the BSEC headquarters yesterday by the stock market regulator on the roadshow held from February 9 to 12 in Dubai.

READ MORE ON B3

Heidelberg seeks to amalgamate with Emirates Cement, Emirates Power

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Heidelberg Cement is going to seek approval from its shareholders to amalgamate with Emirates Cement Bangladesh and Emirates Power Company.

Through a post on the Dhaka Stock Exchange website yesterday, the listed cement maker informed that it is going to organise an extraordinary general meeting on May 2 to seek consent in this regard.

In 2019, the German cement manufacturer decided to acquire Emirates Cement Bangladesh and Emirates Power Company at a cost of nearly Tk 183 crore.

Emirates Cement Bangladesh, which was incorporated in 2000, produces and retails cement in both the local and international markets.

The company's factory situated in Munshiganj has the capacity to produce 660,000 tonnes of cement per annum.

Meanwhile, with a production capacity of 10 megawatts, Emirates Power Company supplies energy to Emirates Cement Bangladesh, which registered sales of around Tk 69 crore in the last nine months.

The listed cement maker has been incurring losses since the second quarter of 2019 due to fierce competition in the market, higher prices of clinker, imposition of advance income tax and higher interest costs.

However, Emirates Cement which mainly markets two brands -- Scan and Ruby -- made a profit in the first quarter of 2020.

The listed cement manufacturer incurred a loss of Tk 17 crore in the first nine months of this year compared to a profit of Tk 94 lakh a year earlier.

Heidelberg Cement Bangladesh, which was listed in 1989, did not provide any dividend to its shareholders last year due to losses.

Along with its depressing performance, the company's stock prices plunged around 50 per cent to Tk 161 in the last two years.

DSE turnover nosedives to seven-month low

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Stocks nosedived yesterday when the market's turnover reached a seven-month low due to a confidence crisis among investors.

DSEX, the Dhaka Stock Exchange's (DSE) benchmark index, dropped 90.77 points, or 1.65 per cent, to 5,385.21.

Turnover, an important indicator of the stock market, was downed by 32 per cent, to Tk 467 crore. The last time it was so low was on July 29, 2020 when turnover reached Tk 399 crore.

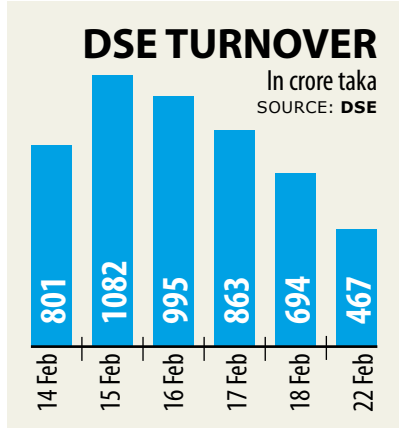
The index has been overcast for the last couple of weeks, so many stock prices were a source of losses for investors which ultimately had an impact on confidence, said a stock broker.

Investors have their money stuck as they can not sell shares without incurring losses, he said.

So many investors are silent now, he said, adding that investors' funds were mostly stuck with stocks of Beximco Pharmaceuticals, Robi Axiata and LankaBangla Finance.

If investors hold stocks of companies with good performance records, they will not end up losing out in the long run, so they should not go for making sales, he added.

Companies whose performances are low might be the cause of losses anytime, he added.



The index has been overcast for the last couple of weeks, so many stock prices were a source of losses for investors

gainers' list rising 10 per cent, followed by Intech, Walton Hi-tech Industries, Unilever Consumer Care and the Mithun Knitting and Dyeing.

Beximco topped the turnover list with trade worth Tk 105 crore followed by Robi Axiata, British American Tobacco Bangladesh, LankaBangla Finance and Beximco Pharmaceuticals.

Prime Finance First Mutual Fund shed the most dropping 6.50 per cent followed by Mir Akhter Hossain, Robi Axiata, Jute Spinners and Sandhani Life Insurance Company.

Meanwhile the port city bourse also dropped. The CASPI, the Chittagong Stock Exchange's (CSE) general index, fell 256 points, or 1.61 per cent, to 15,564.99. Among 186 stocks to witness trade, 26 rose, 122 dropped and 38 remained the same.

"The index has been falling for the last few weeks, which badly downed our portfolio," said stock investor Abdur Raheem, adding, "Investors are in panic."

Panic is contagious, so it further intensified the market fall, he said, adding that institutional investors need to invest more in the market to keep investors' confidence alive.

The turnover's fall proves that institutional investors are now not active in the market, he added.

In the DSE, 23 stocks rose, 219 declined and 101 remained unchanged.

Alhaj Textile Mills topped the

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for 30 years of journalistic integrity and their unwavering commitment to fighting for the truth.

HERE'S TO 30 YEARS MORE.

Bangla CAT

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Abu Naser Chowdhury, deputy managing director of Social Islami Bank, attends an event where certificates were presented to trainees under an SIBL-UCEP Skills Training Project.



Kamran T Rahman, president of Bangladesh Employers' Federation (BEF), attends the inauguration of a two-day seminar on "Human Resource Management-Performance based wage system" organised by the association and The Association for Overseas Technical Cooperation and Sustainable Partnership of Japan in Dhaka yesterday. ITO Naoki, Japanese ambassador to Bangladesh, was present.

Biden to revise small business loans to reach smaller, minority firms, says official

REUTERS, Washington

US President Joe Biden will launch changes on Monday to the main US coronavirus aid program for small businesses to try to reach smaller, minority-owned firms and sole proprietors left behind in previous rounds of aid. Biden administration officials said that for two weeks starting on Wednesday, the Small Business Administration will only accept applications for forgivable Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans from firms with fewer than 20 employees to ensure that they are not crowded out by larger firms. The changes, to be formally announced by Biden on Monday, come as small business bankers say demand for Paycheck Protection loans is slowing as

firms reopen. When the PPP was launched in April 2020 at the height of coronavirus lockdowns under a \$3 trillion relief bill, its initial \$349 billion ran out in two weeks. Congress approved another \$320 billion in May, but the program expired in August with about \$130 billion in unused funds. The program was re-launched on Jan. 19 with \$284 billion in new funds from a coronavirus aid bill passed at the end of December, and a Biden administration official said about \$150 billion of PPP money is still available. But Biden administration officials said there are still many minority and very small firms in low-income areas that have not been able to receive aid. The changes aim to make it easier for firms with no employees



US President Joe Biden delivers his inauguration speech at the US Capitol in Washington.

sole proprietors, independent contractors, and self-employed people such as house cleaners and personal care providers -- that could not qualify previously because of business cost deductions. The Small Business Administration will revise the rules to match the approach used to allowed small farmers and ranchers to receive aid, the businesses said. The officials said the program will also set aside \$1 billion for businesses without employees in low- and moderate-income areas, which are 70 per cent owned by women and people of color. The SBA will provide new guidance making it clear that legal US residents who are not citizens, such as green card holders, cannot be excluded from the program.

German business confidence bucks shutdown impact

AFP, Berlin

German business confidence improved in February, a key survey showed Monday, as the robust industrial sector of Europe's top economy bears up despite the impact of coronavirus restrictions. The Ifo institute's monthly confidence barometer, based on a survey of 9,000 companies, climbed to 92.4 points from 90.3 points in January, when the index slipped as tougher measures to fight the pandemic were introduced. Analysts surveyed by Factset had expected a smaller increase of 0.4 points. "The German economy is showing its resilience despite the lockdown thanks to the strong industrial economy," Ifo president Clemens Fuest said in a statement. The manufacturing sector recorded its highest score since November 2018, surging to 16.1 points from 9.1 points last month. The mood in the services and retail sectors also brightened, inching up to readings of minus 2.2 points and minus 14.6 points respectively. Ifo said managers were upbeat about their current situation, rising to 90.6 from 89.2 points last month, while the expectations sub-index jumped to 94.2 from 91.5. Germany this month extended orders for bars, restaurants, leisure facilities and non-essential shops to stay closed until at least March 7 while allowing schools to partially reopen. Crucially for production, factories have kept up output during the second wave of the pandemic and are seeing strong demand from China in particular. But it remains unclear when other businesses will be able to resume operations. "It's a nice surprise," said LBBW analyst Jens-Oliver Niklash of the closely watched indicator. "But there won't be a quick and full economic recovery without the prospect of a reopening." After dropping sharply in January, the number of new infections has plateaued in February in Germany amid serious concerns about highly contagious virus variants. Germany has recorded nearly 2.4 million Covid-19 cases since the start of the pandemic, and almost 68,000 deaths. GDP shrank by five percent in 2020, its worst contraction since the financial crisis of 2009, due to the impact of the pandemic. The government has forecast a 4.4-percent rebound this year but the uncertain future of the outbreak could force Berlin to revise the estimate downward.

'Antique Chinese traditional fruit basket' sold on Amazon for \$72 is actually a chamber pot

THE STRAITS TIMES, Singapore

If you thought the "1960s Chinese traditional fruit basket" selling for C\$68.45 (\$72) on Amazon did not look appropriate for the dinner table, you would be right. The item on sale is in fact a chamber pot, or a spittoon, commonly used in Chinese households as a mobile toilet for people to defecate or spit into. And it is being sold on the US-based online shopping platform for more than 10 times its normal price in China. Similar spittoons are selling on Chinese

e-commerce platform Taobao for just 28 yuan (\$5.70). The enamel product adorned with a pair of mandarin ducks and the Chinese words symbolising "double happiness" in red was advertised on Amazon as being a Chinese antique with a wide range of uses, from being a vegetable and fruit holder to an ice bucket, or a decorative display stand. It was also recommended as a good gift for housewarmings and weddings, with photos showing it being used to store French loaves, as well as to hold a bottle of wine in ice, placed classily beside a

champagne glass on a wooden table. The listing described the item as an antique Chinese fruit basket with "beautiful colours and patterns" that represent "traditional Chinese culture" and "symbolise the happiness of life". Its "large storage space can store any fruit", it added. The Amazon listing went viral after an Internet user posted it on Chinese social media marvelling at how the humble Chinese chamber pot was being so highly regarded by Westerners. The hashtag "the other ways a spittoon is used" has received more than 50 million views and comments

on Sina Weibo, the Global Times reported. "US\$60? I can't believe my childhood potty is more valuable than I am," one Internet user remarked. The listing went viral after an Internet user posted it on Chinese social media marvelling at how the humble Chinese chamber pot was being so highly regarded by Western buyers. "I hope no one from other countries ever buys this 'basket' and sends it as a gift to their Chinese friends because no Chinese people would feel happy if they see a delicately packed spittoon with fruits in it," another said.



Md Delwar Hossain, chairman of Natural Design and Development, and Md Anwar Hossain, managing director, attend an event yesterday when apartments of Natural Moymuna Tower at Baunia area of the capital's Uttara were handed over to the owners.



Selim H Rahman, chairman of Hatil, receives the National Productivity and Quality Excellence Award from Industries Minister Nurul Majid Mahmud Humayun recently.

India's top court bars final tribunal ruling on Future's \$3.4b deal

REUTERS, New Delhi

India's Supreme Court barred on Monday a final ruling by a tribunal reviewing Future Group's \$3.4 billion sale of retail assets until the top court hears objections from aggrieved partner Amazon.com Inc, three sources said. Amazon appealed to the Supreme Court this month against Future Group's sale to market leader Reliance Industries, accusing its partner of violating contracts by agreeing to the sale. The outcome of the tussle involving two of the world's richest men, Amazon's Jeff Bezos and Reliance's Mukesh Ambani, could reshape India's pandemic-hit shopping sector and decide if Amazon can blunt Reliance's



A woman shops inside the Big Bazaar retail store in Mumbai, India.

dominance of retail. Three people familiar with Monday's proceedings said the Supreme Court ordered that while the tribunal can continue to review the deal and oversee the approval process, it could not pass a final order while the court hears Amazon's concerns. "This is a good thing for Amazon," said one of the sources, who has direct knowledge of events. Indian stock exchanges and the antitrust watchdog have already cleared the deal, which now awaits clearance by the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT), in line with regulatory procedures. A second source said Future had only asked the NCLT to let it to call meetings to seek shareholder approvals of the deal.

Padma Oil Company Limited
(An Enterprise of Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation)
Strand Road, Sadarghat, Chattogram

Ref: 28.22.0000.856.14.151.17/138 Date: 18/02/2021

Corrigendum Notice

For

"Procurement of 2 Nos. x Jet A-1 Aircraft Refueller for POCL Aviation Refuelling Facilities at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport, Dhaka, Bangladesh"
Tender Ref No. PD/BPC/Capex-51/F-14/P-99/20-21, Date: 30/12/2020

This is for information of all concerned that following amendments of Tender Notice have been made:

Sl. No.	Existing	Amended
18	Tender last selling date	22/02/2021 up to 12.00pm
19	Tender closing date and time	23/02/2021 at 02.00pm
20	Tender opening date and time	23/02/2021 at 03.00pm

All other terms and conditions of the tender document shall remain unchanged.

সবই নিলে বড়ো দেশ, দুইভিত্তিক বাংলাদেশ

Md. Aminul Haque
General Manager (Projects), Chattogram
For Managing Director



Tarique Afzal, president and managing director of AB Bank, and Asif Ahmed, acting general manager of Pan Pacific Sonargaon Dhaka, exchange documents after signing a deal yesterday facilitating reciprocal services, including buy-one-get-one buffet meals at Café Bazar.

Microsoft teams up with EU publishers amid Facebook's Australian spat

REUTERS, Brussels

Microsoft and European media groups on Monday urged EU regulators to require online platforms to seek arbitration in disagreements over how to share revenues with news publishers, a sticking point in the spat between Facebook and Australia.

The EU's 2019 overhauled copyright rules, which force Alphabet unit Google and other online platforms to sign licensing agreements with musicians, authors and news publishers to use their work, are not sufficient, Microsoft and the publishers said.

"This initiative is a logical next step," Microsoft Vice President Casper Klynge said, adding that the company already shares revenues with publishers via its product Microsoft News.

Facebook last week imposed a news ban in Australia in protest against a forthcoming law that would require online platforms to reach deals to pay news outlets for content, or agree on a price through arbitration.



Soumya Basu

Visa announces new country head

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Visa has announced appointing Soumya Basu as its country manager here.

Soumya will head operations in Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan, according to a statement.

Late last year, Visa announced plans to establish a country liaison office in Dhaka.

It will host a team of professionals, now headed by Soumya, and introduce new services for Bangladeshi consumers, playing a more prominent role in the growth of digital payments.

With Visa since 2016, Soumya has been instrumental in the strategy and execution of its South Asian franchise.

He previously held management positions in multinationals in India including Tata Group, CRISIL and Diebold Nixdorf.

Singer exchanging washing machines

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Singer Bangladesh is offering new washing machines in exchange of old ones with cashbacks of up to Tk 3,000 along with up to 5 years' warranty, free installation, and free home delivery.

The home appliance maker is also accepting up to 12 monthly installments at zero interest, it said in a statement.

Future proofing: Australia's gas networks look to go green with hydrogen

REUTERS, Melbourne

Australia's natural gas pipeline owners are working to future proof their A\$75 billion (\$59 billion) in assets amid a global push towards clean energy, running tests to blend hydrogen with gas and produce green methane to replace the fossil fuel.

Cashing in on rare bipartisan support for hydrogen across Australia's national and state governments to help cut carbon emissions, pipeline and network owners have already committed A\$180 million to a range of projects involving green hydrogen. Australian states have pledged to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050, in line with many developed countries, but Canberra has yet to commit to the 2050 timeframe.

"It's a business risk we all need to manage," said Ben Wilson, chief executive of Australian Gas Infrastructure Group (AGIG), owned by units of Hong Kong-based CK Group.

"What started out as defensive has become an opportunity, particularly given our renewable energy sources. We can become the world's largest exporter of green hydrogen," he told Reuters.

Pipeline owners seeking government funding for hydrogen projects aim to show how their infrastructure can be used to

deliver hydrogen in blends with gas and store hydrogen as a form of renewable energy storage.

"At the end of the day, we also think that continuing to use this infrastructure allows the whole economy to decarbonise at a lower cost," said Dennis Van Puyvelde, head of gas for Energy Networks Australia.

A study done for the industry body last year found that to achieve net zero emissions by 2050, building a hydrogen distribution network would cost half as much as expanding power networks to serve businesses and industries that currently rely on gas, and save Australia some A\$13 billion.

Pipeline companies are working on a shorter time frame than 2050, as some states are pushing to have 10 per cent hydrogen in gas pipelines by 2030. A study done for the government found hydrogen can be safely added to gas supplies at up to 10 per cent by volume without having to modify pipelines or appliances.

Van Puyvelde said the advantage of blending hydrogen into gas allows for a gradual build-up of the hydrogen industry, requiring electrolyzers of up to 1 gigawatt, compared with the much bigger, more costly electrolyzers that will be needed for green hydrogen exports.

Unusually dry February renews risk to Argentina's soybeans and corn

KAREN BRAIN

After plentiful January rainfall that saved Argentine corn and soybeans from potential disaster, this month is on pace to be the country's second-driest February in more than three decades, once again raising harvest concerns.

Bumper crops were never expected in 2021 for the No. 3 corn and soybean exporter, but last month's rainfall had some estimates on the up-trend. Crop conditions remain stable, though forecasts suggest Argentina is nearly two weeks away from its next substantial rainfall opportunity.

Soybean planting began in earnest in November, while corn planting started more than a month earlier. Rainfall between October and December hit a 10-year low across the country's grain belt, and soil moisture reserves were at a 12-year low for the time of year by the end of December.

January rainfall was nearly 30 per cent above the month's recent average. That set crops up well to enter the crucial yield-formation stages in February and beyond, but precipitation has again turned sparse.

The rest of the month will likely remain dry, with weather models as of Thursday predicting the first week of March could feature the next round of rains.

Total rainfall this month will likely be just half of what is normal. February 2018 was the driest in at least 30 years, some 75 per cent

below the five previous years. Thin rainfall throughout that entire season coupled with hot temperatures led to one of the most disastrous harvests on record.

Crop conditions are holding up well despite the dry spell. This week in the top three provinces of Cordoba, Buenos Aires and Santa Fe, the portions of soybeans rated good or very good were 87 per cent, 84 per cent and 98 per cent, respectively. Those are all within 3 percentage points of the end-of-January scores.

Corn in Buenos Aires is 4 points better than three weeks ago at 93 per cent good or very good, and Santa Fe corn is unchanged at 89 per cent. But corn in Cordoba stands out among the other scores with just 69 per cent good or very good, down 2 points in three weeks.

Cool temperatures have been a saving grace for the Argentine crops, and the grain belt is on pace for the coolest February in more than 20 years. Temperatures over the next couple of weeks are forecast at closer to normal levels and possibly a bit above, but excessive heat is not in the cards.

There are not many years with which to compare given such a dry February, and while that condition is not necessarily a death sentence for the crops, there are some varying circumstances.

For example, strong soybean and corn yields were observed in 2019, and that February was the third-driest since at least 1988. January 2019 rainfall was plentiful as in

2021, but unlike the present season, precipitation was abundant in late 2018 during planting and soil moisture was closer to average. March 2019 rainfall was also average.

History suggests that Argentina's corn and soybeans, like crops in the United States, can combat hot temperatures with high rainfall or low rainfall with cool temperatures, and the latter has helped prevent failure in 2021.

Last week, the Rosario grains exchange bumped its 2020-21 forecast for Argentina's soy harvest to 49 million tonnes from 47 million previously. Corn rose to 48.5 million from 46 million, and those improvements were based on the abundant January rains.

On the same day, the U.S. Department of Agriculture left its outlook for soybeans and corn unchanged from the previous month at 48 million and 47.5 million tonnes, respectively. USDA's soy and corn yields would be three-year lows, about 10 per cent and 9 per cent below the long-term trend, so the agency is by no means expecting a stellar performance.

On Thursday, the Buenos Aires Grains Exchange kept estimates for both crops at 46 million tonnes after having pared estimates a couple weeks ago due to dryness, though it was suggested that the success of crops would depend on upcoming rain.

The opinions expressed here are those of the author, a market analyst for Reuters.

Rangpur's shatranji industry near the end of its rope

FROM PAGE B4

Aysha Khatun, a 60-year-old woman of the same village, said she has been weaving shatranji since coming to Nisbetganj village after her marriage in the late 80s.

"But my wages have never been enough, making it hard to stay in such a laborious profession," she said.

If the wage is insufficient, women will not be interested in such a profession, Khatun added.

Women can easily enter the profession attending a two-month training course organised by the Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC).

The BSCIC arranges training to develop the skills of a large number of women every year. However, no training has been organised amid the ongoing pandemic.

Faruk Hossain, a trainer of the BSCIC office in Rangpur, said at least 600 people, mostly women, were trained in weaving

shatranji in the last three years.

However, the project remains suspended at the moment, he added.

Mostafa Azad Chowdhury Titu, president of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Rangpur, said access to finance was another major problem for small scale investors in the industry.

So he urged the country's banks to disburse easy loans among the related entrepreneurs, particularly women.

There is huge demand for shatranji products in both local and international markets but many large scale factories, including Karu Ponyo and others, have already lost the markets due to the Covid-19 fallout.

"They are now selling their products offering discounts," Titu said.

There is a big market for shatranji products in different countries of Europe but orders were cancelled amid the current crisis, he added.

KEPZ to build first private hi-tech park

FROM PAGE B1

"We want our youth to put their minds into creating jobs rather than looking for them," he said.

To stay ahead in the 4th industrial revolution, IT business incubators are being established in universities to work on the internet of things, robotics, cyber security and other modern technologies, he said.

Work to establish an IT business incubator at Chittagong University of Engineering and Technology alongside a Sheikh Kamal IT training and incubation center at Chandgao of Chattogram is being expedited, said Palak.

Once these projects are implemented, the port and the business capital of Chattogram will grow into a modern IT business hub, he said.

"Some Tk 327 crore has been invested in different hi-tech parks all over the

country by the private sector," said BHTPA Managing Director Hosne Ara Begum.

Some 13,000 jobs have also been created for youths, she said.

Through the support of digital startups, over 7,50,000 SMEs have been able to expand their businesses in different sectors, said Startup Bangladesh Managing Director and CEO Tina Jabeen.

Farmers get funds to recoup flood-induced losses

FROM PAGE B1

The government also provided Tk 136 crore-worth seeds to boost cultivation of Boro rice crop in the current season and Tk 25 crore to increase onion production.

Besides, the ministry gave out incentives to growers for increasing cultivation of hybrid rice.

BSEC appoints special auditor to find out reasons

FROM PAGE B1

The chairman said foreign investors are interested in major state-run projects despite the lower interest rate.

"They want to invest in the power and infrastructure sectors as well," Islam said, adding that foreign investors are not interested in making short-term investments.

"At the roadshow, we presented Bangladesh's potential. Now, emails are coming everyday to know about the sectors of the country," he said.

To meet their investment demand through just the equity market is difficult and so, the BSEC is working on the bond market.

Major foreign investors are not finding good returns from their own country so they are seeking for other potential places to invest.

"Bangladesh carried a negative image among foreigners in the past but we tried to change their mindset by presenting our economic indicators," the BSEC chairman said.

"They were astonished after seeing our data and asked about the trustworthiness of the data. Then we recommended to check," he added.

Islam also said the regulator will arrange a roadshow in other financial hubs like London, New York, Hong Kong and Singapore to attract more foreign investors.

Small garment factories struggling to stay afloat

FROM PAGE B1

They did so just to keep their business afloat, according to a recent study of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD).

So far, retailers and brands have reinstated 90 per cent of the cancelled and suspended orders worth \$3.18 billion, but they are delaying making payments, dealing a blow to the SME units.

Yet in its study, the CPD found that only 44 per cent of factories were certain about orders in the six months to April.

The rest 56 per cent have different levels of uncertainty. Of them, 11 per cent had a high level of uncertainty on orders. These factories are mainly small.

In his heyday, the Gazipur-based garment factory owner used to export garment items worth nearly Tk 70 crore annually and he would pay Tk 1.70 crore in wages to workers every month.

"I owe Tk 70 crore to banks," he said.

He could not qualify for the soft loan from the government-sponsored stimulus fund because of stringent conditions. And he could not repay bank loans from the incomes of garment business.

"I have to sell my factory and the land to repay the bank loans. And the repayment of the bank loan would be the end of my 18 years of business life," he said.

But in the last 18 years, he ran the factory with a hope to establish a business empire. But the fallouts of Covid-19 have shattered his dreams.

This fate of the garment owner is also reflected in the garment export data.

Between July and January, the first seven months of the current fiscal year, garment shipments declined 3.44 per cent year-on-year to \$18.40 billion.

This correspondent spoke to at least 10 exporters having small and medium-sized garment factories and industry leaders to know about the fates of the SME units.

They said the situation had been improving after the first wave of Covid-19 had passed but it started deteriorating with the onset of the second wave as fresh lockdowns were introduced in major export destinations in Europe and the US.

"I have been able to recover 75 per cent of the business. I could not recover 100 per cent because of the second wave," said Mostafiz Uddin, managing director of Denim Expert.

Buyers prefer placing orders with a big unit to ensure deliveries are made on time and as the big units have the room to negotiate prices, he said.

The entrepreneur requested that the government come up with a flexible policy so that all factories, especially the SMEs, can benefit from the stimulus package.

Md Ehterab Hossain, managing director of Base Fashion, and Md Emdadul Haque, general manager of Dynasty Sweater (BD), shared stories of order cancellations and reductions and discounts.

"Orders worth \$2 million were stuck and finally I had to agree to settle it at a 15 per cent discount," said Hossain. Base Fashion ships T-shirts and polo shirts worth \$1 million every month.

"I am struggling to keep my business afloat as the number of orders has plunged," he said.

The abnormal price hike of yarn has just added further woes to the SMEs. The prices of yarn went up by more than \$1 per kg over the last three months, said industry operators.

SMALL AND MEDIUM GARMENT FACTORIES LACK SUPPORT

BGMEA Director Selim said many of the SMEs did not get the stimulus fund because they themselves were not directly making exports.

The closed SMEs used to export one or two consignments and largely worked in conjunction with a big unit through subcontracting.

Rubana Huq, president of the BGMEA, said the SMEs were the worst-affected when it comes to managing finance and business since they worked for buyers having relatively smaller turnovers.

When asked whether there was a gap when it came to a single policy serving both the big units and SMEs, she said, "Absolutely yes."

"Therefore, they require different policy measures to survive in this crisis period," she said.

The government has provided an additional working capital scheme for the SMEs during the pandemic, she said.

However, the working capital loan support was difficult to access as far as readymade garment factories are concerned because of stringent processes requiring due diligence, she said.

Another factor is the nature of business and the modality of financial assistance required for

the RMG enterprises which differ from any other sector, she added.

"For the immediate term, special assistance to SMEs with regard to accessing finance to turn around and reconstruct themselves would be critical for continuing the growth journey of the industry and economy at large," said Huq.

Mohammad Hatem, senior vice-president of the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association, said apparel exporters faced harassment in availing stimulus loans because of stringent conditions and bureaucratic tangles.

Many of the SMEs could not avail the loan at all although they needed it the most, he said.

Some circulars of Bangladesh Bank are unjust for the SMEs, he said.

Only bigger units had been entitled for availing the loan from the stimulus package, Hatem said.

However, after negotiations with the central bank and the finance ministry, the conditions were eased to a bit, he added.

Selim said many of the SMEs did not get the stimulus fund because they were not directly making exports.

KI Hossain, president of the Bangladesh Garment Buying House Association, said most of the SMEs were dependent on subcontracting but now it was not available due to inflow of fewer orders from international retailers and brands.

Khondaker Golam Moazzem, research director of the CPD, said the government's Tk 1,000 crore technological upgradation fund should be spent in its true sense to improve online sales of small and medium units so that they can ride out the difficult times.

Nazneen Ahmed, senior research fellow of the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, said a price war in the global garment business was ongoing.

Since the bigger units have a competitive edge, they can absorb the losses. But small and medium-sized units can not afford that, she said.

Both Moazzem and Ahmed said orders for big factories had not been fully restored. Small suppliers that were used to catering to small buyers and retailers were in trouble.

"The government needs to ensure that the small and medium-sized units receive soft loans from the stimulus packages. Their loan repayment period should be extended," said Ahmed.

Rangpur's shatranji industry near the end of its rope

Worn out by lack of buyers, skilled manpower and high prices of raw materials

KONGKON KARMAKER, Rangpur

The shatranji industry in Rangpur is struggling to survive as demand from home and abroad for the sitting mats made by handloom has diminished amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, according to local traders.

Besides, the increasing price of raw materials has made it difficult for producers to continue operations, they said.

Shatranji also comes in the form of rugs, placemats and carpets.

Around 50,000 people of Rangpur are involved in the making of shatranji products, 95 per cent of whom are women.

Historians say that prior to 1830, shatranji was weaved solely in Pirpur village of Rangpur's sadar upazila.

The carpets and tapestries were used as home decor by wealthy families.

As per the Bengal District Gazetteer published in 1912, author WW Hunter writes that Nisbet, the district collector of Rangpur at the time, was so mesmerised by the unique product that he volunteered to be the lead patron of the local shatranji weaving artisans in 1880.

To commemorate his support to the industry, locals renamed Pirpur as Nisbetganj, which is just 5 kilometres away from the Rangpur district headquarters.

Shatranji sales flourished during the British era, when it was shipped to various destinations including India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia.

It is believed by locals that shatranji has been crafted in the region ever since the Mughal era.

However, the industry fell into crisis soon after the partition of India, when the influx of modern machine-made products forced many artisans to switch to other professions in search of better incomes.

As a result, the industry shrunk to a very small scale in Rangpur.

Besides, financial constraints and



Around 50,000 people of Rangpur are involved in the making of shatranji products such as rugs, placemats, sitting mats and carpets.

KONGKON KARMAKER

unplanned marketing made things more difficult, locals said.

As a result, the industry which once had great potential was on the verge of extinction but despite this crisis, shatranji artists have been creating the product in their own way for a long time.

Things started changing from the

70s though, they added.

Over the years, many shatranji factories have been built in Nisbetganj village in a bid to retain the unique handicraft business but things became more challenging as demand decreased while raw material costs rose.

Garment waste, such as leftover

cotton, is used as a raw material to craft shatranji, local traders said.

Md Masuder Rahman, managing director of the Charushy Shatranji & Crafts in Rangpur, said shatranji weaving was once limited to Nisbetganj village but over the years, it expanded to other upazilas, including Pirgachha and Pirganj.

Besides, a small group of women in four districts of Rangpur region -- Gaibandha, Kurigram, Lalmonirhat and Nilphamari -- were trained as entrepreneurs in this sector.

Around 150 women work at his factory, Rahman said.

A number of other entrepreneurs in the district said online platforms

could be the solution to marketing shatranji.

"A platform that can link traders with buyers could solve the marketing problem," said Mostafizur Rahman, an entrepreneur in Rangpur.

While speaking to The Daily Star on Sunday, Charushy Managing Director Rahman said his factory in Nisbetganj village has been in operation for the last 15 years with 150 handlooms.

"But the diminishing demand for shatranji is making the businesses more troubling," he said.

"And since it is not possible for the industry to survive on just local demand, we want more access to international markets," Rahman added.

The managing director also urged the government to help revive the industry.

Meanwhile, the price of raw materials used to craft shatranji has doubled over the past two years and if this trend continues, then the product price will also increase.

"But if we do that then customers might be further discouraged," Rahman said.

During a recent visit to Nisbetganj, this correspondent found various types of shatranji products, including floor mats, tapestries and carpets, on display.

These days, even handbags are being made in this style at an affordable cost.

Apart from in factories, many women in the area weave shatranji products at home.

Azmiria Khatun of Nisbetganj village has been involved in the industry for the last 10 years.

She needs at least three days to weave a 4 by 2.5 feet shatranji product, for which she gets paid Tk 145.

"It is quite hard for me to earn Tk 2,000 per month from the business as I craft in-between chores," Khatun said, adding that since other professions pay better, many women were leaving the industry.

READ MORE ON B3

GLOBAL BUSINESS

For Black founders, venture funding remains elusive despite new funds

REUTERS, New York

When Donnel Baird first pitched his idea in 2014 to create a technology platform that could help small apartment buildings and other urban structures become energy efficient, he got the US government to promise him \$2.1 million, provided he could raise a similar amount from elsewhere.

But not one of some 200 venture capital firms he approached agreed to invest back then.

Baird believes that initial funding was elusive in part because as a Black man without a background in software development, he was an outsider. Investors did not grasp the opportunity that seemed obvious to him as someone who had grown up in a predominantly Black, low-income neighborhood in Brooklyn, Baird told Reuters.

"That's one of the hardest things about being Black. It is really hard to tease out why things happen. All I know is that the VCs decided I could not pull off what



Donnel Baird, centre, sits with other Echoing Green Black Male Achievement Fellows in New York.

I was talking about," Baird said in an interview. "Silicon Valley has a narrow archetype of what they like to invest in."

Some seven years later, the 39-year-old has become the recipient of one of the largest early-stage funding rounds ever

raised by a Black entrepreneur. His company, BlocPower, has raised \$63 million in debt and equity, with the help of Goldman Sachs Group Inc and other investors. The bulk of the money will go toward financing energy-efficient heating and cooling systems for

BlocPower's clients.

The financing is both a sign that corporate America's growing acknowledgment of its diversity problem is beginning to lead to some change, and a stark reminder that the pace of change is slow. Interviews with Black entrepreneurs and investors as well as a Reuters analysis of venture capital data provided by Crunchbase, a business information company, show Baird is an outlier.

The share of US venture capital going to Black-founded companies stood at just over 3 per cent of the \$147.6 billion of 2020's overall deal volume, the data shows. In the past six years, that percentage has not budged above 5 per cent, even though about 10 per cent of US companies are Black-owned, according to US Census data.

For Black founders, consistent support has come from only a handful of venture capital firms, and many of them are relatively small.

"One of the challenges for Black entrepreneurs is that you

have a good idea, you're ahead of the curve, and you have the skills to execute it, but because they haven't seen a Black person do it, they wait for another person to do it," said Jon Gosier, a Black entrepreneur who said he had to sell one of his more successful ventures a few years ago because he could not find investors.

Venture capital firms, which typically provide funding in exchange for an equity stake, finance only a tiny sliver of US businesses. But their backing can make a huge difference to an entrepreneur's success. Amazon.com Inc, Facebook Inc and many other corporate titans today have benefited from such early backers.

Past founders and employees of such companies have in turn gone on to back other successful ventures. Black entrepreneurs have largely been unable to generate such wealth. The value of equity that Black founders hold in their companies, on average, is about a quarter the value of their white counterparts, a McKinsey & Company study shows.

India to clear 45 investments from China, likely to include Great Wall, SAIC

REUTERS, New Delhi

India is set to clear 45 investment proposals from China, which are likely to include those from Great Wall Motor and SAIC Motor Corp, government and industry sources told Reuters, as military tensions between the two countries ease at the disputed border.

The proposals have been held up since last year after India tightened controls on Chinese investment in the country in retaliation against alleged Chinese troop incursions in the western Himalayan region. China blamed Indian troops for the standoff.

About 150 investment proposals from China worth more than \$2 billion were stuck in the pipeline. Companies from Japan and the US routing investment through Hong Kong were also caught in the cross-fire as an inter-ministerial panel led by the interior ministry increased scrutiny of such proposals.

A federal Home (Interior) Ministry spokesman did not respond to a request for comment on the proposals to be cleared.

Two government sources who have seen the list said most of the 45 proposals set for early approvals are in the manufacturing sector, which is considered non-sensitive in terms of national security.

The sources did not elaborate but two other government officials and two industry sources who are privy to the process said proposals from Great Wall and SAIC are likely to be on the list.

Great Wall and General Motors (GM) made a joint proposal last year seeking consent for the Chinese automaker to purchase the US company's car plant in India, in a deal expected to be valued at around \$250-\$300 million.

Great Wall, which plans to invest \$1 billion in India over the next few years, said earlier that establishing operations in the country is a key part of its global strategy. It had planned to start selling cars in India from this year, and was also mulling bringing in electric vehicles.

Great Wall said it continues to seek relevant approvals and investment clearances.



Military trucks carrying supplies move towards forward areas in the Ladakh region, India.

REUTERS/FILE

Asian markets struggle as inflation worries offset recovery hopes

AFF, Hong Kong

Markets mostly fell Monday as falling infection rates and more good news on the vaccine front were overshadowed by growing worries about high valuations and inflation. While the United States is approaching 500,000 deaths, there is optimism that there is light at the end of the tunnel in the Covid-19 crisis as governments embark on immunisation programmes that will allow economies to reopen.

Expectations that President Joe Biden's vast stimulus will be passed next month are also keeping spirits up, as a raft of data last week on factory and services activity indicated the financial hit to the United States and Europe might not be as bad as feared.

News that the Pfizer/BioNTech jab appeared to prevent nine in 10 people from getting the disease in Israel -- which is the most advanced in its rollout -- provided a positive background.

Israeli officials also said the shot was 99

per cent effective at preventing deaths from the disease. Meanwhile, hopes for a wider distribution were given a lift after Pfizer said its drug could be stored in normal medical freezers instead of the ultra-cold conditions initially thought necessary.

Shanghai led losses, shedding more than one percent as the Chinese central bank sucked cash out of financial markets to ease bubble concerns. Hong Kong, Sydney, Seoul, Wellington, Manila, Mumbai and Bangkok also fell, though there were gains in Tokyo, Singapore, Taipei and Jakarta.

The rally that has characterised the past few months looks to have come to a halt as traders fret that prices may have become a little too frothy. There is growing concern that the expected recovery and Biden's spending package will fire a surge in inflation, which could force the Federal Reserve to wind back the loose monetary policies and record-low interest rates that have been a key pillar of a near-year-long market surge.

"The Biden administration continues

to stay on message stressing Congress's need to pass a significant fiscal package, downplaying recent more robust economic data as... a package exceeding \$1.9 trillion heads for a House vote this week," said Axi strategist Stephen Innes. "The unprecedented and highly stimulatory policy is an attempt to exceed one million jobs a month from April to September. "But timing is everything. The next leg of the reflation will have to be carried more and more by a continued recovery in economic growth... and all the while this will bring the Fed closer to acknowledge that policy normalisation is coming. "And Simon Ballard at First Abu Dhabi Bank warned that more big gains in stocks are "going to create increasing levels of concern."

He added: "It's driven by, on one side, stimulus expectations from Mr Biden and also the expectation of that continued dovish rhetoric and more acceptance of early stages of inflation from the Fed. "However, OANDA's Jeffrey Halley said

Treasury yields were still below pre-Covid levels and that the rise to one-year highs was "no bad thing" as it showed the economy was improving.

Investors are keeping tabs on China-US relations after Biden called on European allies to stand up to political and economic challenges from Beijing. On currency markets, the pound held gains above \$1.40 -- its highest levels since April 2018 -- as the British government's vaccine drive continued to progress well and as Prime Minister Boris Johnson laid out a plan for easing an economically painful lockdown thanks to a sharp drop in infections and deaths.

Bitcoin eased to \$57,150, having hit another record high of \$58,350 over the weekend, and having passed \$1 trillion in market capitalisation. And oil prices bounced after being sold at the end of last week on profit-taking -- having hit a 13-month high -- and as US energy firms slowly restarted operations in Texas that had been hammered by a severe cold snap.